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## JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

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Yielding to the solicitation of our Secretary, who we all know is a man not to be denied or put off, I venture to submit to your consideration a few remarks in honor of our lamented president, James Russell Lowell. The time of preparation at my disposal has been scant, the theme is great, my inadequacy shall be self-confessed. I do not flatter myself with the belief that I could do justice to such a man as Lowell under any circumstances. But fortunately the present occasion does not call for justice. The daily, weekly, and monthly press of our own country and of England has poured forth a mighty volume of criticism, eulogy, and reminiscence. The entire Anglo-American race has had abundant means of measuring its profound loss. As individual Americans, we can do little else than add our modest voices to the universal outburst of regret. Yet as an organized body of instructors, proud to do honor to one who honored us by accepting our leadership and retaining it so many years at no little inconvenience to himself, it is only fitting that we should try to tell the world in general what Lowell was to us in especial.

Lowell, then, was throughout his long and active life, always the scholar. He never ceased to read both widely and closely. "The tumult of the times disconsolate" did not divert his vision from the eternal verities enshrined in the best books of the best men. Even while serving his country at a foreign court, he had an eye and an ear for poets, philosophers, and historians. This catholicity of reading engendered in him naturally a like catholicity of thought and feeling. It is impossible to read even the slightest of his writings without discerning its genuine cosmopolitanism.

Yet Lowell was, for all his ancient and foreign culture, none the less a genuine American of the nineteenth century. Those who impute to him any undue liking for the foreign as foreign talk wildly of what they know not. True, Lowell told us more than once in plain speech what he thought of the abuses in our social and political life. But if that be un-American, then I for

one do not know what is American. Did Jeremiah cease to be a Hebrew when he poured forth the vials of his wrath upon his degenerate race? Did Carlyle cease to be a loyal British subject when he described the United Kingdom as containing thirty millions of people chiefly fools? Was Goethe not German when he told his countrymen that in trying to be polite they were apt to lie? Lowell was not a prophet like Jeremiah, not a cynic like Carlyle, not a satirist like Goethe. He was herein only a man who knew the right from the wrong and feared not to call each by its true name. The Americanism, more distinctively still the Yankeeism, underneath Lowell's ripe culture, is to me so self-evident that I do not understand how others can fail to perceive it at once. Others of our own race, I mean. For to the Englishman this Yankeeism is still and probably will remain a puzzle. English critics, both before and after his death, called him shy. He had to them the air of one who was holding himself back and measuring them. This is only partially true. Lowell was shy in the sense that we Americans are all shy. We need not be ashamed of the trait, it is characteristic of our youthful civilization. It is the unvoiced expression of a need to preserve one's individuality as a condition of gaining adequate and final recognition. In Lowell's case certainly it could never have come from any desire to gauge his surroundings and compare them with himself.

As a truly representative American scholar, then, Lowell may serve as our model. We members of this Association are also striving to be scholars. Not a few of us have enjoyed the advantages of study abroad. We have no cause to complain of our unfamiliarity with the languages and literatures of modern Europe. But are we working in quite the same spirit? Are we exerting ourselves as he did to keep back the dreary waters of ignorance and half-knowledge that perpetually encircle and threaten true culture? Perhaps I have no right to put the question thus bluntly. Yet the doubt comes upon me again and again and will not be laid to rest with smooth words. I might give the question another form: Do we ourselves read enough, do we encourage and stimulate our students to read enough? Or is our people slowly losing its relish for reading as reading? Now the question in this form leads me up to one of Lowell's own exhortations, having which at my back I feel more courage

to proceed. Lowell said, in his address before this Association two years ago :

" There seems to be a tendency of late to value literature and even poetry for their usefulness as courses of moral philosophy or metaphysics, or as exercises to put and keep the mental muscles in training. Perhaps the highest praise of a book is that it sets us thinking, but surely the next highest praise is that it ransoms us from thought. Milton tells us that he thought Spenser 'a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas,' but did he prize him less that he lectured in a Garden of Alcina? To give pleasure merely is one, and not the lowest, function of whatever deserves to be called literature. Culture, which means the opening and refining of the faculties, is an excellent thing, perhaps the best, but there are other things to be had of the Muses which are also good in their kind. Refined pleasure is refining pleasure too, and teaches something in her way, though she be no proper school-dame. In my weaker moments I revert with a sigh, half deprecation, half relief, to the old notion of literature as a holiday, as,

'The world's sweet inn from care and wearisome turmoil.' "

And near the close of the same address Lowell said :

" I think that the purely linguistic side in the teaching of them [modern languages] seems in the way to get more than its fitting share. I insist only that in our College courses this should be a separate study, and that, good as it is in itself, it should, in the scheme of general instruction, be restrained to its own function as the guide to something better. And that something better is Literature."

It was Lowell's method to suggest rather than to state, to state in part rather than in full, leaving to his reader the working out of the final sequence. The passages just quoted illustrate his method perfectly. May I venture to state what he has only suggested, to state fully what he has stated only in part? Lowell wished to give to his countrymen, through us, a note of warning. He feared that we were overlooking the end in the means, mistaking the acquisition of a language for the enjoyment of the literary treasures locked up in that language. And on the other hand we were making literature itself too much of a study and not enough of a pleasure. Both mistakes have this in common : they favor the head at the expense of the heart. According to Lowell we are to read for pleasure and it is this *pleasure* that shall teach us. The truth is not a new one. Three centuries before Lowell, Sidney uttered it in his noble 'Defense of Poesy.'

But truths as old as the hills need re-telling to each generation. It was Lowell's right and privilege to re-tell this truth to us. For one, I feel the timeliness of Lowell's warning every day. The unwelcome perception forces itself upon me that I am teaching a body of students who do not read for reading's sake. They perform their allotted tasks creditably enough, they know what I have a right to demand of them, they make no objections to a reasonable amount of what is called collateral reading. But they do not seem to go beyond the strictly needful, they do not jump over the wall of the snug college paddock and play the truant on the green hill-side. Is my experience different from that of my colleagues? I trust it may be, but I fear it is not. Lowell, you will observe, speaks of the *old* notion of literature as a holiday. Fortunately it was not too old to have become defunct in my college-days. At the risk of being dubbed a *laudator temporis acti*, a tiresome praiser of the good old days that never were, I venture to believe that our collegians thirty years ago, while they may have studied less than their present successors, read more and read better books. Those were the days when Longfellow and Emerson, Hawthorne and Lowell too were in their prime with Whittier and Holmes, and we read each fresh emanation of their muse with hearty unquestioning delight. Such readings were in truth our college holidays.

But perhaps I am in danger of being misunderstood, as if I were arguing for the conversion of the *study* of literature into mere recreation. Yet in strictness I am not arguing for anything. So far as the college study of English literature is concerned, my only regret is that it is not made more comprehensive and also more searching. I am no believer in reducing the study of a literary masterpiece to a mere appeal to the feelings. The more of intellectual discipline is put into the study, the better. My remarks were directed to private reading away from the class-room. Can we as teachers increase this reading in quantity, and also improve its quality? The problem is difficult and to be frank I see no royal road to its solution. I have no scheme of university-extension to propose. The matter does not call for schemes, but rather for personal example and influence. If we desire to make readers of our students, we should begin by setting the fashion, we should also—shall I say it—make ourselves personally interesting and objects of imitation. This last

assertion will doubtless be a surprise to all and a stumbling-block to some. I can hear one and another exclaim *sotto voce*: What! Is it down in the college programme that I am to be not only a good scholar and a good teacher, but also a *beau idéal*? The quality of being interesting can not be commanded, however desirable. What suggested it to me was the part that Lowell played as Harvard professor. I speak on this point with much diffidence. Not having enjoyed the privilege of sitting under his instruction, I am forced to rely wholly upon common report and upon the recently published reminiscences of him by Harvard graduates. These reminiscences, if I mistake not, agree in describing him as a most unorthodox teacher, but a most fascinating leader. One enthusiastic disciple, whose words unfortunately I carelessly neglected to preserve, but whose spirit I am confident has not escaped me, expressed himself to this effect: We, that is a few of us, were reading Italian literature, Dante, with Lowell. But we were never sure, before we met, what we were going to get from him. It might be Dante, it might be just as well Cervantes, or Shakespeare, perhaps even Homer. But whatever it was, it was always of Lowell's best, spontaneous, bright, profound. It always opened our souls to the possibilities of literary insight, it left us hungry and thirsty for more. And to read with and after him was a pleasure.

This I call teaching of the highest order. It may have counted for little in the Harvard registry-books, but its influence in moulding the characters of Harvard's literary *élite* must have been incalculable. Alas, we can not all be Lowells. The more's the pity. But can we not effect something in his spirit? What Lowell did was to infuse into his teaching his personality. Have we no personality worth imparting? Let us not confess it to our shame. There is not a teacher in our midst so young and inexperienced as not to know something well, to be interested in it with all his heart. Will it not be possible for him, then, to make his students feel that on that one subject, if on no other, he is always approachable and even glad to be approached? The discipline of the recitation-room is a wise institution. I am far from seeking to belittle it. But beyond and above discipline there is humanity, and the young are quick to perceive and act upon it. Our instruction, certainly our college-instruction, always seemed to me too formal, too routined. Yet I see no reason why

the humblest instructor should not be able to give a bit of himself, to let the class into the workings of his mind, give them an inkling of his doubts, his likes and dislikes, his studies, his opinions, and especially how he came by his opinions. This insight into his reading may be the surest way of teaching them to read. And, as Goethe wisely said :

“ Ein Werdender wird immer dankbar sein.”

The mention of Goethe leads me by easy transition to a third point in these remarks. It is in the nature of a stricture upon Lowell, although stricture is too harsh a term for what I am trying to express. I wish to touch as lightly as possible upon what seems to me a limitation of Lowell's literary sympathies. I do not hesitate to say that his culture was the broadest and richest that our people has yet exhibited. Yet in one element I think it could have been broadened and quickened. Namely in its appreciation of German literature, and especially of Goethe. No one would be so ill-advised as to suggest that Lowell did not know German literature well. Undoubtedly he had read many of its masterpieces repeatedly. Yet I question his thorough sympathy with it. As to Goethe in particular, I go so far as to believe that he never quite mastered the great German, that he never bestowed upon him the patient loving devotion that he gave, for instance, to Dante, or Cervantes, or Molière. Why this should have been, I do not know. Perhaps Lowell's tastes and habits had been fixed in favor of Romance before his attention was directed to German. Possibly even there was something in the temper of German that was not wholly to his liking. Be the cause what it may, the fact remains, that Lowell did not turn spontaneously and naturally to German for his illustrations. Let me cite one bit of evidence. Two years ago he addressed our Cambridge meeting. His subject was the place of Modern languages and literatures in our college-life. Of this address I need only say that it is in his happiest vein, genial, suggestive, humorous, temperate in tone, noble in style. Like most of his writings it is rich in apt quotations. The greater number are naturally from English. But there are five from other languages, that is, one from Homer, one from Virgil, two from French, one from Spanish. There is not one from German.

It is true, he speaks in one place of Goethe, but what he says only confirms my belief, already stated, that he had not really mastered Goethe. The passage is this:

"Goethe's *Iphigenie* is far more perfect in form than his *Faust*, which is indeed but a succession of scenes strung together on a thread of dramatic or moral purpose."

Is *Faust* only "a succession of scenes strung together"? This might be said of the First Part, which has very little of the original Faust-story and could be very fairly entitled *Heinrich und Gretchen*. But the real Faust is contained in the Second Part, and that—so far from being a string of scenes—is an almost logically rigorous development of the Faust-idea. We of the present day are only beginning to comprehend the poem as a whole.

But it would be idle to find fault with the limitations of genius. It is much wiser to accept our man of genius as he is and make the most of him. We are to be thankful that providence has given us a Lowell to be at once our "guide, philosopher, and friend." For he was in every sense a man, not a mere writer of elegant poetry and instructive essays, not a mere colporteur of international ideas. He lived the full life of a man who stooped to nothing sordid, who scorned whatever was ignoble in speech or in action. And herein certainly we are to follow him. Not every one can be the poet and critic, but it is in everyone's power to be the man. In Lowell's own words, "Heaven alone may be had for the asking." We have lost one of our great leaders. How great, our children's children will know even better than we. But in the loss there is the consolation that Lowell did not live in vain. His image is in our hearts, serene and ineffaceable. I can think of no more appropriate motto for him than these lines from Goethe's memorable lament over Schiller:

"Denn er war unser! Mag das stolze Wort  
Den lauten Schmerz gewaltig übertönen!  
Er mochte sich bei uns im sichern Port  
Nach wildem Sturm zum Dauernden gewöhnen."

Indessen schritt sein Geist gewaltig fort  
Ins Ewige des Wahren, Guten, Schönen,  
Und hinter ihm in wesenlosem Scheine  
Lag, was uns alle bändigt,—das Gemeine!

JAS. MORGAN HART.